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CHURCH ATTENDANCE.

A NON-CHURCH-GOER.

It is a generally admitted fact that in these days only a small proportion, even of intelligent and eminently respectable people, are regular attendants upon religious services on Sunday. It is believed, and frequently deplored, that the proportion is diminishing year by year. The increasing aversion of people who cannot be called bad or depraved to church attendance is generally ascribed to the spread of unbelief; but this does not wholly account for it.

The world has, indeed, been moving very rapidly during the last generation, and theology, which used to be in the van of human thought, and in some measure to lead in human progress, has fallen to the rear, and is in imminent danger of being left altogether. The results of scientific and philosophic inquiry have widely diffused an intelligent common sense, which will not accept teachings that were once potent over the human mind. People do not like to be fed on the dry leaves of an antiquated theology in which the sap of life has ceased to flow. Dogmas which used to keep the superstitious mind in subjection, and rule the lives of men through their hopes and fears, have lost their power, because enlightened thought declares that there can be no such terrific chances in another life as the world used to believe.

It is useless to fight against the tendencies of the age, or to deplore them as evil, for they are in the line of human progress. Men are better and not worse than in the olden time, and yet they believe less in the supernatural and the unprovable. The majority of intelligent and well-meaning people, whose purposes are good, whose aspirations are high, whose conduct is upright, do not and cannot believe what the churches teach, and they are weary of its reiteration. In fact, the keener their apprehension,

the clearer their mental vision, the stronger their powers of thought and the broader their intellectual culture, the less willing or able are they to stoop to the yoke of belief which the church imposes. It is not the daring atheist or the reckless evil-doer that is now chiefly found in the ranks of non-attendants at church, but the sober citizen and the father of a family, who is loyal to his convictions and faithful to his duty.

Why does he not go? Why should he go? It is for the church to attract, and it repels. It proscribes thought and free inquiry. It cramps the brains of its ministers until it is only the intellectual light-weights that seek its service. The mediocrities of the seminaries go to the pulpit. They offer nothing for the mental or moral digestion and nutrition of healthy men. They minister chiefly to the superstitious, the narrow and the morbid, and the masculine sex is disappearing from among their followers.

There is no doubt that people are repelled from the pews because the pulpit is behind the age. The notion can no longer be kept up that "unbelievers" are bad. It has to be admitted that they are, as a rule, intelligent, earnest, and altogether honest. They still cherish the hope, at least, of a future life, and they certainly have no "enmity toward God." They want to lead decent and well-ordered lives, and bring their children up with good principles and high ideals. They recognize the needs of their higher nature, and have no objection to its being called a spiritual nature. They recognize the value of appeals to the purer feelings and the loftier sentiments. They know that through the eye and ear the soul may be reached and benefited. They would be glad on their weekly day of rest to subject themselves to elevating influences, and bring their families within them. Having this want, and recognizing this need, they still keep away from the "sanctuary," partly because it so inadequately provides for them. They do not find there satisfaction for the soul, and modern society, dominated by an antiquated ecclesiasticism, is failing to provide for the spiritual wants of man. It is therefore failing to arrest the working of those forces in human nature that tend to moral degeneracy. Science is to-day doing more for morals than the Church.

But, as was stated at the outset, unbelief is but one cause of non-attendance at church. There are many who would put up with a good deal of decayed theology, and try for themselves and

their children to obtain benefit and satisfaction from church-going for the sake of the sustenance of the better nature and the stimulus to the higher impulses, inadequate though they be, were they not actually repelled from the church-door by the demands made upon them if they enter. A common excuse for not going to church is the same as a common excuse for not getting married. Men of modest means and a fair share of pride and self-respect "cannot afford it." They would willingly pay in the form of pew-rent a reasonable compensation for such benefit as they could get; but having obtained their seat and paid for it, they find themselves subjected to constant solicitation for a hundred purposes that have no connection with their reasons for wishing to go to church. Perhaps the church which they wish to attend, through a policy which they had no part in making, and which they would never have approved, is involved in debt, and they are asked to help it out of foolish bankruptcy. They are asked to subscribe for foreign missions, though doubting the benefit to distant savages of the five dollars' worth of teaching which it costs a hundred dollars to give them. They are called upon to contribute to various charitable enterprises and entertainments,—not called upon simply, but persistently urged, when they have their own personal notions about charitable aid, in accordance with which they do in private what they can afford or feel disposed to do. They find that in what claims to be the temple of the meek and lowly Saviour, who gave his special blessing to the poor, and was himself more slenderly provided for than the foxes and the birds of the air, they cannot feel at home unless they are comparatively rich. The Church to-day is a beggar, not humble and meek in its demands, but greedy, persistent, almost impudent. Our seeker for sustenance and inspiration for his better nature finds himself in a congregation of daughters of the horse-leech, ever crying: "Give, give!" and he flees in weariness and disgust from their importunities.

And yet it is not his pocket alone that is sensitive. His self-respect and pride are hurt. He thought, perchance, that among the professed followers of the meek and lowly one, there might be a sort of equality of position, as among joint heirs to a common inheritance compared with which earthly resources are said to be insignificant. But he finds that the continual calls for contribution and for aid in the entertainments and charitable side-shows of the Church serve the purpose of gauging a man's

worldly means, and he is relegated to his place in the social grade of the Church according to his ability to pay for it. Perhaps his means are modest, and the private demands upon them all they will bear. In that case, he is nobody in the society of the Church. He is made to feel that he and his family are measured and estimated according to the scale of worldly treasures, and he becomes discontented and unhappy. He concludes that if the modern Christian Church is the guardian of the gateway to heaven, it is easier for a whole caravan of camels to thread the postern of a needle's eye than for a poor man to make his way through the formidable barrier. He gives up his search in that direction for elevating and encouraging influences in life's trials, and, with the conclusions of science and philosophy, makes a more comfortable, if not a better, sanctuary for himself and his in his own home. Churches, at least in large cities, are for the rich, and serve rather a social than a genuine religious purpose; chapels and mission schools are for the poor, who are thereby made to feel their inferiority; but for the great class of reading, thinking, and active men of the age there is no provision made for spiritual salvation.

A NON-CHURCH-GOER.

REV. DR. WARD.

I MUST confess to a certain embarrassment in attempting to comment on the paper of "A Non-Church-Goer," from a difficulty I find in determining whether it should be treated as a serious communication or as a sort of jest. As a serious attempt to state facts I could read it only with astonishment, for from beginning to end it assumes as well-known fact what is well known to every person of intelligence upon the subject to be the reverse of fact.

The substance of the article in review is the repetition, with variations, of the assertion that "it is a generally admitted fact that in these days only a small portion, even of intelligent and eminently respectable people, are regular attendants upon religious services on Sunday." This is palpably untrue, and yet it is reiterated again and again. "The majority," says the writer, "of intelligent and well-meaning people, whose purposes are good, whose aspirations are high, whose conduct is upright, do not and cannot believe what the churches teach, and they are

weary of its reiteration." After making this assertion, that intelligent and moral people have generally withdrawn from attendance upon our churches, the writer then proceeds to discuss reasons for his false fact.

It would have been the part of an intelligent writer to make at least superficial investigation to discover whether the facts are as imagined. One whose purpose, however, is simply to stir up the lions may not care whether his stick is tipped with fact or fancy. But the fact is easy to obtain. It is patent to the eye, and a few minutes' search in the Census Reports and in the Year Books of our religious bodies would give the desired information to any one who was not desirous to remain in ignorance of it. I suppose it is the United States that is chiefly being considered in this discussion ; and it is a fact easily demonstrated that the proportion of members of so-called Evangelical Protestant churches is now considerably larger than at any previous time within the century. There is in the United States a population of fifty millions of people of all ages. Of these, over ten millions, more than one in five, are communicants in Evangelical Protestant churches. Mind, I say communicants. I do not say nominal members, adherents. I do not count in the baptized children. There are actually enrolled as communicants, who are chiefly adults, by trustworthy statistical reports, by count and not by guess-work, over ten million men and women. These represent five million families which are attendants at church, and the children of which, and many of the adults, are attendants but not communicants. We are within bounds if we say that they represent thirty millions of people who recognize themselves as attendants or adherents of the churches. Here we have at once a handsome majority of our people in this Protestant division of the believing Church. But we must add to these, according to the best computations, over six millions of Catholics. "A Non-Church-Goer" may deny that either they, or the thirty million Protestants, are "intelligent and eminently respectable people"; but he cannot claim that they "do not believe what the churches teach." That would be absurd. They do believe.

We have, then, at a moderate calculation, thirty-six of the fifty millions of our population who are recognized as regular attendants on those churches whose faith, we are told, has ceased to attract men of culture and intelligence. Of these ten millions

are active communicants of Protestant churches. And this immense number of communicants represents a rapidly increasing proportion of our population. In 1800, there were, according to the best available statistics, 365,000 Evangelical communicants in the country, being seven per cent. of the population of 5,308,483. In 1850, there were 3,529,988 such communicants, being fifteen per cent. of the population of 21,191,876. In 1870, there were 6,673,396 such communicants, being seventeen per cent. of the population of 38,588,371. In 1880, the communicants had risen to 10,065,963, being a little over twenty per cent. of the population of 50,152,866. The increase in population since 1800 has been ninefold; that in Evangelical communicants has been twenty-sevenfold, three times as great as in the population. So much for the random assertion that "only a small proportion, even of intelligent or eminently respectable people, are regular attendants upon religious services on Sunday," and "the proportion is diminishing year by year." On the contrary, the proportion is increasing so rapidly that if "A Non-Church-Goer's" life should be prolonged many decades, the greater likelihood is that he will have to hide himself away or emigrate to escape the danger of being converted.

Does our imaginative friend say that he had in mind the "intelligent and eminently respectable," and that the church-members and church-goers are of a different class? He dares say it, probably, for he gives no evidence of measuring his words; but it would be palpably untrue. It does not need proof that the classes which are eminently non-intelligent or non-respectable are, like our friend, almost to a man, non-church-goers. When a previously vicious man attaches himself to a church, it is a step toward respectability. The Church educates its members in honesty and thrift. Church-members average much more moral, intelligent, and wealthy than non-church-members. This is the natural product of their church-training. Go into almost any community and you will find the "eminently respectable" people generally church-goers, if not church-members. Every village this side of Tombstone, Arizona, is full of the proof of it. If you find anywhere a community which does not go to church, you find one where life is not safe, and where Judge Lynch does the preaching. It is the saloon and grogery population which supplies the larger part of non-church-goers.

But do not intelligent men keep away from the church? Yes, some of them, but not many. The vast majority of really intelligent people are adherents of the church. Some are not, but they are comparatively few. There are men of French or Spanish birth who have learned to despise Romanism, and who, in throwing it off, have thrown off all faith. There are Germans by birth who have succumbed to a local tide of unbelief. There are Jews to whom Judaism seems a decayed religion, and who have accepted no other. There are physicians who have learned that brain activity and mind activity are correlate, and who conclude it is all brain and no soul. There are students of nature who see majestic, immutable laws, and are satisfied that the law of the vibrant atom and the developing molecule is God enough. There are brave and good men who have thought out, or thought along the accretions of accepted creeds, and suppose they must reject the creeds no less than the accretions. There are thousands of such, and they have their own coteries in our cities where they chiefly abound, and they are numerous in the aggregate; but they are yet a small fraction compared with the great body of our intelligent and moral people who still are attached, and in increasing ratio, to our churches.

I speak of the United States, not to avoid the mention of Darwin and Huxley and Tyndall, but because it is by this country that we must judge the truth of the assertion made. I am not afraid to speak of Germany, with its Emperor William and its Prince Bismarck, stout believers, and its scholars less unbelieving and its churches less recreant to faith than fifty years ago; of France, less atheistic than at the beginning of the century, and with a rapidly growing Protestant strength, with its successive ministries so strongly Protestant; of England, notwithstanding that majestic name of Charles Darwin, and those other honored names I have mentioned, but which can be easily matched in science with three times as many names of scholars of nature and of humane learning who cherish the Church of Christ; the England whose prime minister is "fed on the dry leaves of an antiquated theology in which the sap of life has ceased to flow," but who, somehow, is the robustest man in the British empire; the England whose Darwins and Tyndalls, even, christen their children in the old churches. I might speak of these, but I wish only to deny the strange assertion that the religion of Jesus Christ, and the churches which embody it, have ceased to keep their hold on our intelligent and moral public.

Does "A Non-Church-Goer" wish to tally names? Who stand at the head of our departments and schools of science? Who are they in geology? Go down the list, from Dana and LeConte, and see whether they are church-goers or not. In biology, begin with Gray, the stoutest Darwinian of them all, but a devout member of an orthodox church; in astronomy, with Young and Newcomb; go through all the sciences and count their devotees, and I am not afraid to let the tally tell whether the Christian faith has been rejected. Who are the friends of education? Who scatter their money over our land to sow it with colleges? It is Christian men, almost exclusively Christian men, who do it in the interest of the Christianity which they love. Who have sent teachers to our freedmen and our Indians, and are giving them common schools and universities to pay the debt we owe them and to make them intelligent citizens? Who else is it that loves intelligence and morality enough to do this but Christian believers? When a body of people who have repudiated the Church do the same, we are surprised, and fill the air with plaudits. Mr. Adler's Society for Ethical Culture, with all its strength of wealthy Hebrew and Gentile unbelief, has established a kindergarten or two for the poor in this city, and we praise it loudly. It is well done. But Sarah B. Cooper and her San Francisco Bible-class have established five times as many — and what of it?

The Church exhausted? The sanctuaries empty? Who does not go to church? Take any village and reckon from house to house of the reputable inhabitants, and they nearly all go to church. Watch the front doors of Fifth avenue, and see what one fails to open at half-past ten Sunday morning to send its dwellers to church. The world of society, of culture, of wealth goes to church. "Where do you go to church?" is one of the first questions asked of new acquaintances, because all go to church somewhere. Ours is a church-going people, a church-respecting, a church-honoring people, and never more so than now.

Here I might stop. If the assumption is wrong, the explanations given are not worth considering. The two given are as false as the assumption that our churches have ceased to attract. One is that our intelligent people have ceased to believe the dogmas of the Church. It must be met with a simple denial. The other is as amusing as it is amazing. It is that churches make such enormous pecuniary demands on people that they cannot

afford to go. Seeing that church privileges for a family cost, on an average, in our city churches, less than one moderate smoker's cigars, the weight of this objection can be judged. I should have thought a certain shame would have prevented its being offered. I can assure "A Non-Church-Goer" that church-goers love to give money for what they think will promote education, morality, and religion, and that with them it increases the popularity of a pastor if he is very faithful in urging them to open their pocket-books for benevolence. I must also tell him that I was inclined to regard him as having written not in earnest, and as having attempted only to gather into shape the wildest current prejudices, largely because he gives utterance to this objection to the Church, and because, in doing it, he repeats the quip that it costs a hundred dollars to get five dollars to the heathen. If he had said this deliberately, with intention to be believed, he would have been guilty of slander. The statement is a falsehood, unredeemed by a shadow of evidence. Our missionary societies publish full financial reports; anybody can read them; they are managed by careful business men, and as economically as any other enterprises; and only a small and reasonable percentage is spent for management, a smaller percentage than is spent by our life insurance companies, which do their business at home.

Our non-church-going population, like our church-going, may be divided into its two classes—those who think and those who do not think. Of the latter, the vast majority have inherited or absorbed a general belief in Christianity. They do not go to church simply because the churches have not yet got hold of them. The progress of the churches is reaching them, and will gradually get them. But the thinking non-church-goers are, to a great extent, unapproachable, because they are unbelievers. For their unbelief, however, the churches are, to some considerable extent, responsible. A very great part of them do not believe because believers make Christianity incredible to them by their unconscionable demands on their credulity. Tell a man that he must give up the results of his studies of geology and biology, or give up the Bible, and he will give up the latter, unless he has the sense to know that these dilemma-swingers speak without authority, and are the Church's silly people. If the Church could kill off its *mallei hæreticorum*, there would be far fewer heretics to be hammered.

But I cannot pause to develop this attractive subject, and to do so would be a concession to "A Non-Church-Goer." What these slaves of tradition say is not what the Church says. The Church is founded not on their traditions, but on Christ Jesus; and the world is accepting Christ Jesus as Master as never before in its history. The churches are full of enthusiasm and zeal. The work of converting the world goes on rapidly. The islands are already evangelized. We have just welcomed Christian Madagascar to our sisterhood of nations. In each successive decade India doubles its Protestant population. Christian nations ruled two hundred millions of people at the beginning of the century. Now they rule six hundred and eighty-five millions. Whether by conversion, colonization, or conquest, the world is rapidly becoming Christian. This is the greatest age for the spread of our faith since the first century. And in the face of all this, with the marvelous enlargement of nominal Christianity all over the globe staring him in the face, and the rapid increase in church communicants under his very nose, our "Non-Church-Goer" shuts his eyes (and his purse) that he may open his mouth and babble about an "antiquated theology," and a Church which "has ceased to attract," and "the majority of intelligent and well-meaning people" who "are weary of the reiteration" of the Church's faith!

WILLIAM HAYES WARD.

REV. DR. PULLMAN.

CHURCH-GOING in the United States is not diminishing, it is increasing—in what ratio to the increase of population can only, at present, be a matter of estimate. The public religious services of the Church have never been so numerous attended as now, nor by so large a proportion of intelligent and responsible people. And the most striking religious phenomenon of the age—the rise of the children's church—makes it certain that religious instruction and worship are more universal among us than ever before. The local exceptions to this statement are dependent on local causes.

That numbers of decent and intelligent people are non-church-goers, is not denied; but if the fact is more frequently deplored than formerly, it is because their position is more clearly seen to be anomalous and deplorable. The Church is

more keenly alive to its own function, and perhaps to their merits, than ever before; and makes no secret of its strong desire to bring them into the many-mansioned house of worship, love and duty. For this purpose it is ready to make—and, in its splendid Protestant variety, it does make—many adaptations of itself to differences of means, belief, intelligence, and culture; but it can make no concession of the foundation on which its temple stands, and by virtue of which alone it has the right to be. Possibly a slight concession from the other side—some modification of the truculent spirit and the rasping tongue—would make matters easier. It is not conducive to amiable feeling to have the fault-finding non-church-goer call out, in effect: “I am out of your dilapidated and beggarly old ark; and I can stay out, too, for I don’t believe there’s going to be much of a shower; but if you will let me a pew cheap, and stop preaching things that I don’t believe, and not ask me to do or to give anything more, I will come in.” This is about what Walt Whitman wanted—a place in which to “loaf, and invite his soul.” The position is an untenable one. A church made up of such constituents could have no church-value. The idea of paying your money at the door, without further responsibility, except to be amused or edified, as the case may be, is not the church idea. It is the theater notion; and it only needs the liberty to applaud and hiss in the church to make the resemblance complete. All the malcontents in the Cave of Adullam cannot rear and maintain a church on this idea. The experiment has been tried, by men of exceptional furnishing for the task, and its futility has been demonstrated by recent conspicuous failures.

The position of the self-justifying church-absentee is even less tenable now than formerly. For not only has the Church, in many of its branches, placed itself fully abreast of all the demonstrable progress of the age, but its value to the social organism is more apparent. And the fact stands clearly out, that, with all its imperfections on its head,—its defects of administration, excess of conservatism, and occasional illegitimacy of method,—the Church is the chief bulwark of the social order, the generating center of moral force, the educator, comforter, and inspirer of man, the ladder by which he climbs out of the abyss.

It is quite as idle to consider what humanity might or would be without it, as to inquire whether, in a case of decapitation,

the head or the body would lose or suffer most. The Church is altogether indispensable to human welfare. And in these brave, bright days of hope and progress, made brave and bright by deeper faith, higher morals, and larger achievement than have ever before blessed mankind, every one who is at all conscious of duty, need, aspiration, or who possesses intelligence, wit, worth, or other power, ought to be in the Church either as penitent, learner, helper, teacher, worshiper, reformer, each or all. Every one who has a stake, small or great, in the social order, is bound to contribute to the cost and sacrifice by which that order is maintained. Organized society, at its best, is but a thin crust over a seething ocean of evil and destructive passions, which continually threaten to break through and destroy. The attempt to keep these formidable passions in check by brute force has always ended in catastrophe. The only method by which society can protect, advance, and bless itself, is the method of conversion,—changing evil into good, its enemies into friends,—and this is the method of Christianity and its church, pursued to-day with tireless energy and sacrifice, under better methods, and with better results than ever before.

Law and government, the ostensible guardians of order, fall into ineptitude unless continually supported and controlled by a sound and vigorous public conscience; and to this conscience the Church is chief tutor. Let it be noted that the amazing intellectual activity of this age, with its unsparing criticism and bewildering conflict of opinion, is not a school of morals. Intellectual vigor can coëxist with moral paralysis. Educated men lie, and thinking men steal, by whatever ingenious periphrasis their skill may disguise their act. Conscienceless intellectual power is only splendid deformity. And the men of this make-up constitute our really “dangerous class” to-day.

It is conspicuously untrue to say that science is doing more for morals than the Church. Science may apply its method to ethics with some valuable results, but it can never supply the adequate moral motive. It is not too soon to claim true science as an ally of religion; but it is also important to note that the pseudo-science of pretentious doctrinaires has done much to confuse and unmoralize the age. That moral character which is the safeguard of society is only formed by the special and methodical training of the individual will.

Now, ignorance, vice, and violence, craft, greed, and fraud

are the ever-active enemies of society. And the non-voter and the non-church-goer are their allies, the "dead-wood" of the social order. The one makes bad government possible; the other renders moral anarchy not impossible. Both are unfaithful to duty, and virtually claim to be a privileged class,—the gentlemen-pensioners of society. That among the shirkers who cumber the ground of an active and hopeful era, there are men of intelligence and respectability, is admitted. Some of them stand aloof because they profoundly distrust all accepted methods, and have no faith in the proffered substitutes. They seem, to themselves, to stand

"Between two worlds,
One dead; the other powerless to be born."

It is this condition, the last result of an over-driven critical faculty, that makes them

"On the battle-ground of heaven and hell stand palsied."

But this partial excuse does not cover the case of a man who openly justifies his withdrawal from a great interest and institution of society and life, by a pretext which, under analysis, amounts to this: "I have too much brain and too little money to go to church; therefore, I stand aloof." He uses and enjoys the privileges and security of society without contributing to the cost and effort by which they are maintained. Who support the Church? Men and women who greatly care for human welfare. Do they owe the captious and fastidious non-church-goer a Church from which has been eliminated all the beliefs that give it value to them?

A man may call the Church a beggar, and the State a beggar, because they both ask money and service from him; but I know of no more impudent beggary than that which is content to owe its moral welfare and social security to institutions which it freely condemns, but will neither support nor reform. Such men are spendthrifts of the moral capital accumulated by a dutiful and God-reverencing ancestry. And the climax of this kind of thing is reached in the complaint that no provision is made for the spiritual salvation of the great class of reading, thinking, and active men. The fact is that the most of these men are in the Church to-day, deeply interested in its welfare, and trying, at least, to

work out their salvation in some worthy fashion. Are we to understand that those remaining outside are the supersecular elect, awaiting the revelation of some new principle of spiritual salvation more suitable to their superior position? Alas! in sober truth, brother literate non-church-goer, you shall find no other road to salvation than that which has been trodden by obedient feet in all the times of man. Righteousness is salvation. To perceive and obey the eternal laws, the moral order of the universe where you are at school,—this is the task to which you are set, along with your illiterate and humble brother, from whom you are differenced only by your larger responsibility. Righteousness is salvation; and unrighteousness, though it be reading, thinking, active, and covered foot-thick with culture, is damnation!

It is freely admitted that some of the criticism directed toward the church-dogmas and practices is keen, sound, well-placed, and thoroughly deserved. Much of it, and much of the strongest of it, is from within. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend." The Church is not Christianity, but an instrument for the administration of Christianity; and we very well understand that "we have this treasure in earthen vessels." But much of the outside criticism comes from pure ignorance of the forces actually operating in the Church. Some critics assume a decline of power, for no other apparent reason than to have the pleasure of explaining it. They say society is getting worse, and the Church is failing to arrest the degeneracy. They forebode evil, see rocks ahead, and raise the doleful cry of Cassandra; but the maggot that troubles them is in their own brain. Some minds are dazed over the magnitude and intricacy of modern civilization. But bewilderment is not likely to be clear-sighted. The man who feels safe in a row-boat, would, when transported to the deck of the great iron steamer in mid-ocean, be agitated by strange alarms. Mighty and mysterious forces are throbbing around him; he does not comprehend them; he distrusts, and apprehends disaster. Yet is the great steam-ship safer than the row-boat, carries more, and carries better, moves faster, and, with a firmer precision guides its huge bulk across the vast sea-mountains to its appointed haven. Danger, indeed, there always is, but it is danger better guarded against.

We hear talk of the decay of faith. There is no decay of faith—there is a change for the better in its objects. Nowhere in

history will you find an age of faith, if this is not one. Timid souls idealize the past, long for the old days, and hug the old ways; but the new are better. Men speak of the decline of religion; but there is no decline of religion. There is a change in theological belief; but that is in the interest of religion. We are to have fewer formulated beliefs, but we are to believe them, with perfect conviction, through and through. There is a rising of other potencies by the side of religion, but they will only relieve it of its usurped functions, leave it free for its appointed work, and become its firm allies. Within the Christian Church to-day, the Augustinian theology is undergoing extensive alterations and improvements, not in deference to outside clamor, but in obedience to that law of progressive self-development which has kept the vast and beneficent organization of the Church flourishing in undiminished potency through so many secular changes. The Church is strengthened, not weakened, by such changes. The Holy Ghost is not a spent force, although

"The old order changeth, yielding place to new;
And God fulfils Himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world."

Pending these theological reforms within the house, sundry brethren are camping out under temporary shelter-tents, called theism, agnosticism, and the like; while certain others, mistaking the busy sounds of renovation for the tumult of destruction, are shifting as best they can "in the open," awaiting the final downfall of the church, after which they think likely they may take a hand in the edifying of a better one. But the great storm that is to complete the destruction does not come; and on the part of those who have suspended their religious operations to wait for it, there can now be detected a kind of Wigginesque disappointment, so to speak, and a growing disposition to build the tomb of the prophets who have misled them.

The truth is, the wave of doubt and negation, generated by the sudden and vast increase of our knowledge of second causes, which hid from bedazzled eyes for the moment the great first Cause—this wave has spent its force without institutionalizing itself outside the Church. It has washed away much superstition; it has greatly accelerated the change of theological sentiment within the Church. And it has left the real lights of science and philosophy in such a mood of intelligent common

sense that, were a crisis to declare itself, in which the only issue was "the Church or no Church," they would rally to the defense of the Church at any cost, and against all enemies. It is probable that most of the non-church-goers would do the same; and the really deplorable thing in the present situation is, that they do not, without waiting for a crisis, at once abandon their untenable position, come into the church, and use their intelligence, respectability, and whatever other power they have, where it belongs and can be made effective. For it ought not to escape their intelligent attention, that the Church is really in the hands of the laity. The great Reformation gave the world that boon, and set in motion the forces that will destroy forever the hateful dominance of the priestly hierarchy. In our reformed churches, men of intelligence, character, and convictions readily become influential, and can shape church methods to the needs of these better times. Not that they can successfully meddle with that pure gold of truth which has on it the divine stamp. "Anybody," said the smart and confident student to Dr. Wayland, "can make such proverbs as those of Solomon." "Sit down and make a few!" blandly responds the doctor. There are possibly some things in the Church which even an intelligent and eminently respectable non-church-goer could hardly better. But the laity can put a stop to the "war-whoop" style of preaching. They can abolish all unworthy and beggarly "side-shows." They can change the aspect of the "money-test" concerning which they are so sensitive. In fact, however, such reforms as these, where they were needed, have already been largely accomplished. There is plenty of preaching that is equal to the highest intellectual demands. In mind, scholarship, variety of culture and accomplishment, and in intelligent interest in human affairs outside the dogma, the Christian ministry has never stood so high as now. The superseding of the priestly by the manhood function of the ministry has greatly increased its influence and value. There are few communities and few intelligent individuals who do not recognize the worth of the Christian minister to society and life.

There never was a time in the Church when character counted for so much and mere money for so little; nor when the man of moderate means could join the congregation with his family, and worship in peace and self-respect at so little relative money-cost.

REV. DR. RYLANCE.

"A Non-Church-Goer" has been a keen observer of certain "signs of the times" affecting the organized religions of the day, and tells his conclusions to the world in a vigorous style. He never condescends to nice qualifications; sees no merit in the subjects of his criticism; seems not to have the slightest suspicion that anything worth hearing can be said on "the other side." But that sort of temper is apt to carry a man beyond the bounds of discretion, in dealing with questions that touch his antipathies, the judgment being biased by angry feeling. We have evidence of some such disturbing influence having been at work in the mind of "A Non-Church-Goer" in his severe castigation of the religious societies about us. His hatred of the deficiencies and follies he sees in those societies has blunted his power of discrimination, men and things being condemned wholesale, so to speak. He starts timely and serious questions for our consideration, but there is little of the judicial temper shown in his discussion of them. Sometimes they are handled in a way that, to many fair and liberal minded men, will appear offensive, I suspect. In such estimate we may fairly hold, I think, his somewhat contemptuous "fling" at the clergy as a class, as being made up of "intellectual light-weights,"—only "the mediocrities of the seminaries" betaking themselves to the pulpit as a calling. So, too, may we esteem his unqualified charge, that the Christian Church "proscribes thought and free inquiry," and that it "cramps the brains of its ministers"; "the superstitious, the narrow, and the morbid" almost wholly composing its congregations to-day, from which "the masculine sex" is rapidly "disappearing." This implies, by the way, a very humiliating reflection upon women.

Now these things are not only in bad taste, but, to a large extent, they are untrue. All professions have weak representatives in their service, the Church having its full share, no doubt; but to speak in a scornful way of the intellectual ability, the learning, the general culture, the liberality, and the broad, pliant sympathy of men in the clerical profession that one could name by the score or by the hundred, is to betray an extraordinary amount of ignorance, or a serious lack of moral honesty. But "A Non-Church-Goer," on second thought, I am sure, would not so speak.

Simply remarking that an exaggerated importance is attached

to the financial impediments alleged to lie in the way of the men who would, but who do not, go to church, I pass to the consideration of matters of serious importance: for there is so much of pith and point in the contribution of "A Non-Church-Goer," and so pertinent are many of his animadversions on existing conditions and tendencies in the religious world, that we can well afford to overlook indiscretions into which his impetuosity has led him.

Some of the things he emphasizes and complains of it were well worth while for the churches of our time to take heed to. It is high time that their rulers should cease to assume that men and women outside their "folds" are "totally depraved"; or that a defective creed necessarily means an immoral life; or that eternal damnation inevitably follows from refusing to accept all that the Church prescribes as essential to salvation. Let preachers have done with casting discredit upon "mere morality"; let them frankly and at once give up all of what tradition has handed down to us that a sober criticism has proved to be incredible; and let the "fundamentals" of belief be reduced to a minimum, leaving "ample room and verge enough" for inquiring minds to play freely round all matters of "uncertain obligation." Touching these things, I heartily sympathize with the feeling of "A Non-Church-Goer," the fact being obvious to an honest discernment that there is a vast amount of fine intelligence and of moral worth in the world which acknowledges no allegiance to ecclesiastical authorities, and for which the Church must provide some fitter doom than the "final fire."

I accept, also, the leading assumption of "A Non-Church-Goer" as in the main sound; for it is notorious that a very considerable number of men in Christian countries are to-day indifferent to the claims and calls of the Church, and it may be—though this I am inclined to doubt—that the number is rapidly increasing. I care not to go to statistics or to census tables for proof or disproof of the assumption. Every Christian pastor knows, to his sorrow, the reluctance of men to submit themselves to any sort of ecclesiastical yoke. Fathers and sons are often absent from church, when mothers and daughters are there. Or if now and then present, from motives of expediency, men very often stand aloof from the real worship and work of the Church, or they look on with a sort of distant

respect; many of those who thus far conform to Church usages having very little faith, there is reason to fear, in what is ordinarily said and done in our synagogues. Thus the case, as it presents itself to me, though not as bad as our critic represents it, is still very bad. There is, no doubt, a great deal in the world about us to-day to lend countenance to the cant one hears about religion being an affair for women and children only.

This indifference to Church claims exhibited by "the masculine sex" has doubtless resulted, in part from conditions and causes alleged by "A Non-Church-Goer." Men are unquestionably less dependent to-day upon the clergy for moral teaching and guidance than they once were, while they hold many of the dogmas of theology, once generally and fervently believed in, to be nothing better than ingenious refinements or conceits. And this being the just mental attitude of many men toward things that the Church is supposed to indorse, it is not strange, considering how little sound logic there is in the world, that all that the Church insists upon is by some supposed to be just as unreliable; and hence blank infidelity.

But there are other things that repel men from the portals of the Church, or which make church-going a weariness sometimes to men who nevertheless will go. The best that can be said of "the service," as a whole, often is that it is a capital discipline for patience. There is such an absence of evidence, at times, of any well-defined purpose having brought a congregation together, that a suspicion of the unreality of the whole business will now and then steal over a thoughtful on-looker. Then there is the dreary, mechanical reading of the Scriptures that one occasionally still encounters, with such a want of fitness often in the selections read to the conditions and actual needs of men to-day. Then the preaching is too often about men, or issues that are no longer of importance in the world's regard, the preacher waxing warm in defense of some fiction of theology or other, or trying to interest his hearers in some barren bit of ecclesiasticism. These things are hard to bear by men of intelligence who go to church, while they doubtless deter some men from going. In simple fairness it should be said, however, I think, that such afflictions are but seldom encountered to-day; for our preachers, as a class, it may be justly claimed, are not only sincere and earnest, but discerning and intellectually alert.

The things just enumerated, then, make up, in my judgment, a substantial installment toward an answer to the question, why so many men stand aloof from the Church to-day, or show it only a formal respect. But there are items of importance still to be added—items which I find in “the tendencies of the age.” Against these tendencies “it is useless to fight,” however, says our “Non-Church-Goer,” assuming that they are always and invariably good; whereas, to me, some of the most dominant of them seem to be desperately bad. Of one thing experience makes us well aware, of the fact, namely, that there are powerful influences at work in life as we know it, that indispose men from thinking seriously about the things of religion, and which harden them against all its appeals and constraints. Men are absorbed, for example, in the pursuit of material interests as they never were before, making life for many a fierce and continuous contention, and so leaving little time, and less inclination in them, for the quest after “the true riches.” Then the rapid increase of wealth in the nations of Christendom has begotten sensuous tastes in multitudes, who accordingly prefer to worship in the opera-house rather than in the church. Or if the Church is to win them on one day out of seven, it must bid for their patronage by furnishing similar attractions to those that the opera supplies. Now, will not any sensible and observant man living in New York to-day, or familiar with the life of any of the great cities of Christendom, say that these things, with those before specified, have much more to do with the prevalent neglect of church claims than the discoveries of science have, or than the assaults of an iconoclastic infidelity? Many men of some Christian faith are, no doubt, seriously disturbed by these; some may have lost all confidence in the distinctive truths of Revelation, and have consistently ceased from all show of respect for the Church. But the cases are comparatively few, I suspect, either because men have so little time to look into scientific or critical objections to religious truth, or because, having looked, they find that there is nothing in the objections that discredits any essential element in that truth, and so they conclude, for awhile longer, to “lag behind the age.”

I, for one, have little fear for Christianity or for the Church, from “the march of intellect,” or from the advance of science; science, as I understand it, making no pretensions to be considered a rival of Christianity, nor having anything to offer

as a substitute for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There is a good deal of a hazy sort of doubt abroad just now, begotten very largely by rumors of what research and criticism have done to discredit the doctrines and institutions of religion. But a great deal of the babblement one hears to-day about "progress" is really afflicting to discerning souls, science having as yet done literally nothing to unsettle a single essential article of the Christian faith or to weaken a single hope which that faith inspires. As long as the Church continues to embody and to teach that faith, even though very imperfectly, it will not cease to attract the confidence and reverence of mankind. As long as sin and misery are in the world, some other and better method of dealing with them and of healing them will be necessary than is known to the civil magistrate or to the police authorities.

To anticipate anything like a speedy collapse, therefore, of ecclesiastical organizations is, in my judgment, simply silly. Predictions of some such issue have been often let loose in the social air, but little has come of them. It is amusing to read to-day M. Comte's large concession, that his followers might occupy Christian temples as they should fall into disuse, seeing how few have "changed hands" in the interval of half a century. There is a good deal in and about the churches to provoke men of progressive views to anger; but no sensible man will contend that an institution otherwise good may be discarded, simply because it is not always worthily represented; else what ground of respect would be left for any institution or instrument of civil society? Claims that the Church may be disbanded can only be reasonably preferred when it has been shown that the work it has professed to do may be done better, or that it is actually being better done, by some other instrumentality. "A Non-Church-Goer" seems to hint in one place that such is now the fact, where he tells us that "science is to-day doing more for morality than the Church"—one of his rashly impetuous utterances. Yet even he feels the need of a ministry for his "higher nature," which need science does not meet, we must infer. Where else, then, will he look for it? What school or society of men, other than the Christian Church, makes any sort of pretension of supplying the need? None that I know. While, touching interests of a more tangible sort, it may be claimed for the Christian Church, I believe, in spite of all its defects and failures,

that its disappearance would prove to be a widely-felt disaster. It inspires gentle and humane feelings into men, women, and children as no other institution or agency even pretends to have the capacity of doing; it preaches, and to a large extent practically applies, the doctrine of human brotherhood, urging persistently the duty of mutual helpfulness; it prescribes a wholesome discipline for individual and collective life; educates men in practical virtues; and begets an enthusiasm for goodness in multitudes of men and women which makes itself felt in the outlying world. The Church is even charged with intemperance in the vastness and the costliness of the enterprises she undertakes in behalf of degraded tribes of mankind abroad, and in the manifold provision she makes for the ignorant and helpless at home. Her theologies in parts may be "antiquated,"—"dry leaves,"—but her religion has been, and is, a thing of life and power.

J. H. RYLAND.